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ABSTRACT

A mutual support model was developed to prepare teachers to meet the needs of mainstreamed handicapped children at the University of Akron (OH). In 1975 the university was among the first to receive funding from the Bureau of Education for the Handicapped. Among the first tasks that year was the challenge of changing the attitudes of faculty who saw mainstreaming as "just one of those fads". Speakers were brought in and workshops held to increase awareness among the faculty that the project would indeed impact on all facets of teacher education. The project was developed on three levels, the project level, the field site school, and around each public school student. By developing the project across all levels and involving project staff, university faculty, the university teacher trainee and field site staff in the model, a much more complete support system was developed. Among results of the project were that over 90% of the college of education faculty understood, appreciated, and were supportative of the needs of handicapped children; and at least 50% of the faculty have been actively involved in the development of the model or extended project activities. (Author/PHR)

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Staff Development in the Mainstream:

A Mutual Support Model

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Staff Development in the Mainstream: A Mutual Support Model

In 1975 The University of Akron was identified as one of the original recipients for Dean's Grant funding by the Bureau for the Education of the Handicapped, U.S. Office of Education. This grant activity was designed to impact upon pre-service training programs in education, to prepare the graduates to more effectively meet the needs of handicapped children in the mainstream.

The Challenge

The University of Akron has approximately one hundred faculty members in the College of Education training program. The organization of the College in 1975 was traditional with little or no information about handicapped children and their educational needs being taught outside the Special Education training program. The faculty in Special Education consisted of six full-time faculty members and part-time faculty members as necessary. The Dean's grant funding preceded the federal and state legislation and the resultant activities which brought a concern for the handicapped into the forefront of education. At the time of funding the faculty of the College of Education saw mainstreaming as just one more fad in education which would soon disappear. Not only was it necessary to design an effective strategy for integrating the total training program with knowledge of the handicapped, but a positive attitude must also be generated. The intent of Dean's grant funding was to create change without developing an alternative training program with specially trained faculty or by adding on courses in special education and thereby increasing the program.

The Plan

The first year of the Dean's grant was designed as a year to produce attitude change in the faculty and to deal with creating a cadre of advocates across the College to assist in faculty change. In addition, a field base for the training program had to be established. To facilitate the coordination of the program a project manager was employed. The addition of this staff member specifically assigned to the project allowed full-time attention to be given to the task. A steering committee with released time paid by the grant was also identified. From the start of the project an attempt was made to identify the effort as a college project not a Special Education project.

National consultants were brought in to speak to the faculty to verify the authenticity of the project as well as serve as an information source for the faculty. To increase the awareness of the faculty small group luncheons with guest speakers were held and printed material to support the project was provided. Direct contact, however, seemed to be a limited approach to move the faculty forward. Only a unified approach which impacted on all facets of the educational process appeared likely to produce the necessary change.

The Model

The Mutual Support Model was developed on three levels, at the project level, at the field site school and around each public school student.

At the project level the components included the interface of the project staff, the advisory committee, with representation from each department in the College, the student participant trainee committee and the field site school committees (See Figure 1).

At the field site school level the component included the interface of the project staff, the University Advisory Sub-committee designated for each site school, the site school committee, and the participants assigned to that respective school (See Figure II).

Each public school student being served would be assigned to a mutual support team consisting of the project staff committee members, the University Advisory Committee member, the respective field site school faculty member, and the participant trainee assigned to provide direct support to the child. In addition the total college faculty became periodic resource persons on a need basis as determined by individual student assessment (See Figure III).

By developing the model across all levels and involving project staff, University faculty, the University teacher trainee and field site staff in the model, a much more complete support system was developed. Each member of the developing model was exposed to field practice and problems as well as training requirements to develop a full-service person in the field.

The second and third years of the project were used in clarifying the model and continuing in-service support to an expanding field base as well as the University faculty. Support from a state mandated teacher redesign focus and summer institute funding assisted in moving the model development forward.

Results

Over 90% of the College of Education faculty understand, appreciate and are supportive of the needs of handicapped children.

At least 50% of the College of Education faculty have been actively involved in development of the model or extended project activities.

All departments in the college have examined their respective training programs and made some adjustments to include information, and training about the handicapped.

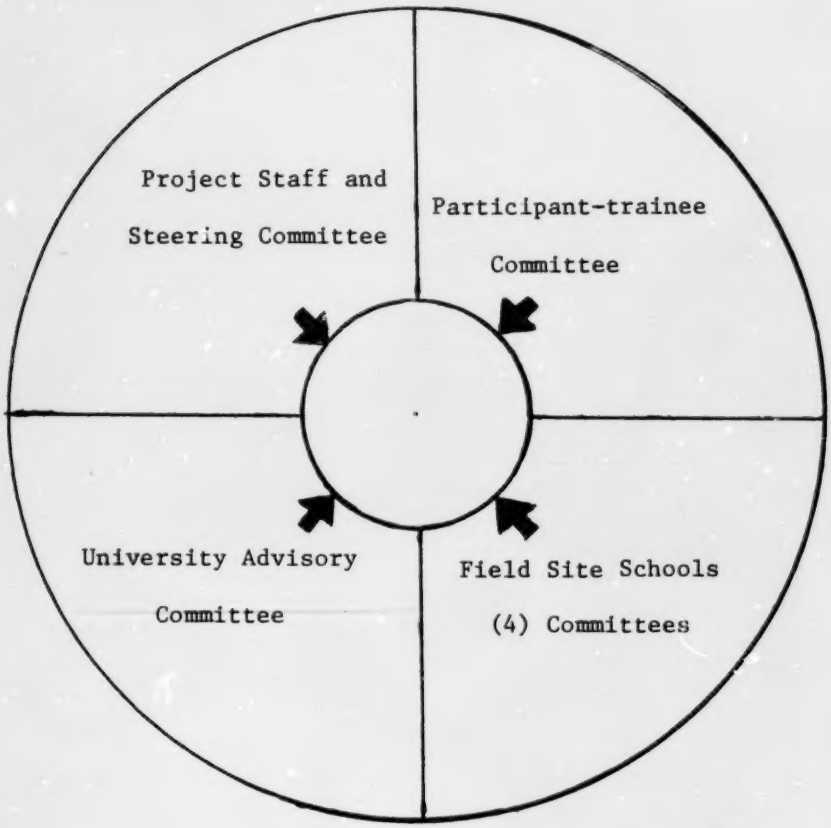
One hundred and fifty field site teachers have been trained in ten schools with an additional fifty participants and seven schools to be added the Summer of 1979.

Approximately forty teachers in training have been involved in the model development and field site placement.

Federal funding is not continuing at the present time, but the activities developed continue to be productively utilized. We now have a receptive faculty, trained field site personnel, some change in college training and an increasing awareness of the necessity for continued activity. Much is yet to be accomplished and only time and practice will be the ultimate judge of the efficacy of the model.

Figure I - Mutual Support Model

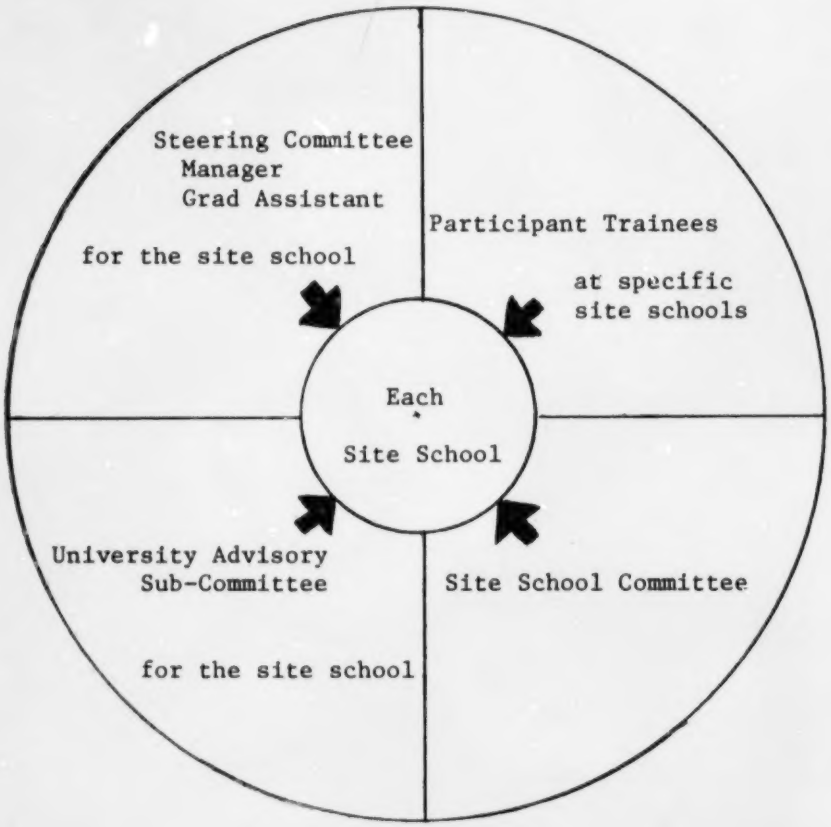
Level I - Total Project



Four committees; one of participants with representatives from each site school, one with representatives from each field site school committee, one of the University Advisory Committee, and one of the Project Staff and Steering Committee will coordinate whole-project activities. These committees will consult together on concerns common to all three levels. For special activities, all these leadership level committees may be combined.

Figure II - Mutual Support Model

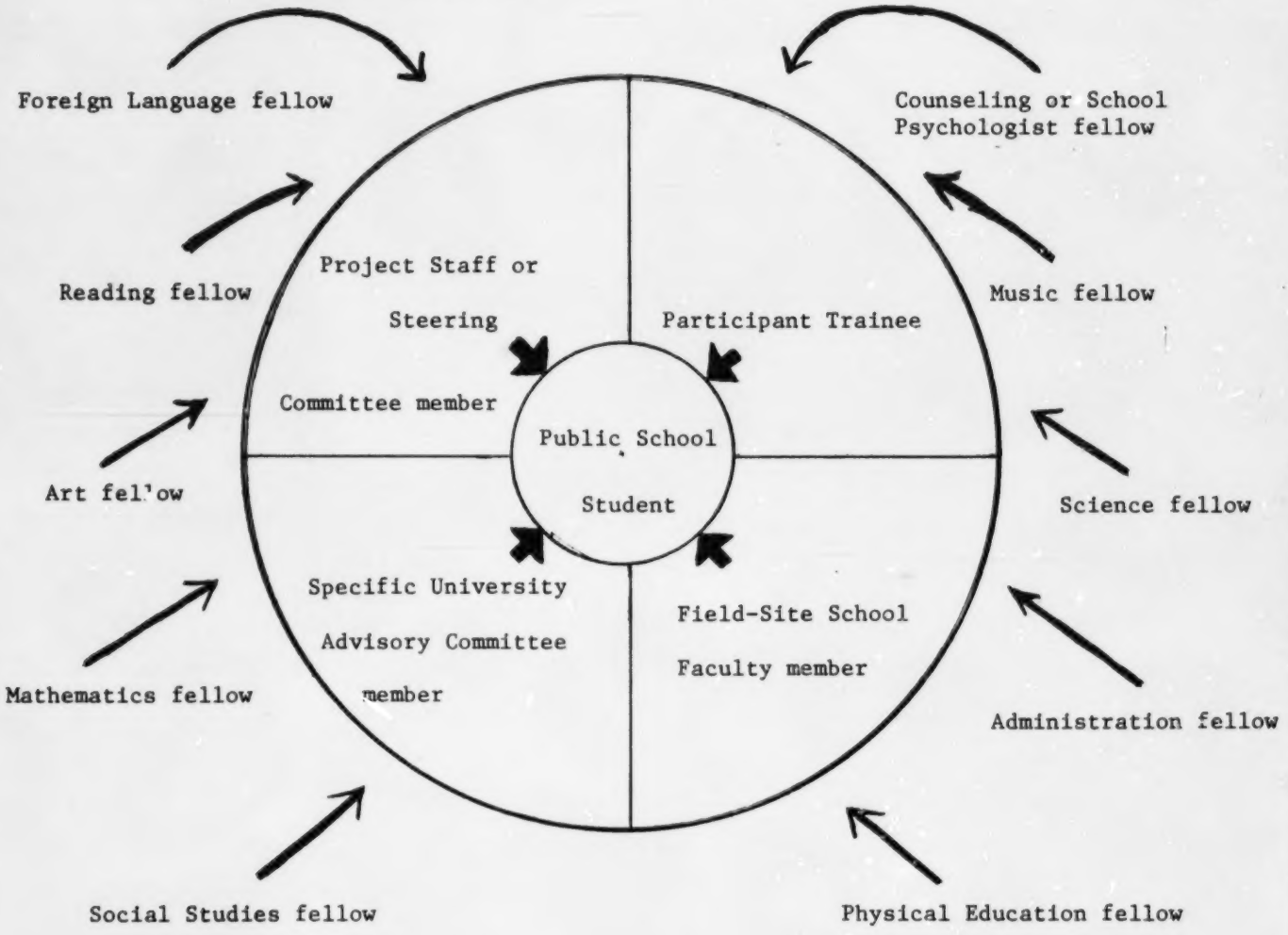
Level II - By School



Each field site school will have four groups in the Mutual Support Model. These groups will consist of the participant-trainees at that school, the field site faculty committee of that school, the University Advisory sub-committee members for that school and the Steering Committee members, plus the graduate assistant assigned to that school. These committees will oversee progress in training at each school plus assist in particular concerns related to individual school implementation of the model. Each group will serve as resource to all the other groups at that site school.

Figues III - Mutual Support Model

Level III - Public School Student Centered



Each public school student who is Mainstreamed will have an assigned committee, comprised of one participant trainee, one field-site faculty member, one University Advisory Committee member, plus support from Project Staff and Steering Committee. This supportive committee will plan, direct and evaluate each individual student's progress and needs. This committee will be supplemented by periodic support on a per-need basis from an expanding and/or contracting group of fellows representing the total University faculty. The decision to use a particular fellow will be based on an identified need to better serve the integrated child or children.